DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 203 484 EA 013 674

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TITLE Two Views of Techniques for Developing Community-Based Education in a Teacher Corps Project (Project Personnel Perspectives).
INSTITUTION Teacher Corps Recruitment and Community Technical Resource Centers, Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Education (ED), Washington, D.C. Teacher Corps.
REPORT NO RCTR-CBE-PN-2
PUB DATE Jul 80
CONTRACT 300-79-0312
NOTE 44p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Citizen Participation: Community Attitudes: *Community Involvement: Community Surveys: Educational Needs: Elementary Secondary Education: *Experiential Learning: *Needs Assessment: School Community Programs: *School Community Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Community Based Education: Teacher Corps

ABSTRACT

Two papers by experienced Teacher Corps project personnel describing techniques and approaches used in the development of community-based education are presented in this document. The first paper, by Elaine P. Witty and Yvonne B. Miller, explores methods for identifying educational needs perceived by the community, including group discussions, interviews, surveys, and participation in meetings of community organizations. The paper also comments on integration of community experience and school learning in terms of educational activities, program content, and program goals. The second paper, by Alan Brown, identifies six reasons for citizen participation in education, details five approaches to assessing community educational needs, and itemizes twelve kinds of experiential learning activities that could be included in a community-based program. (PGD)

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ED203484

COMMUNITY BASED EDUCATION

Paper Number TWO

TWO VIEWS OF TECHNIQUES FOR DEVELOPING COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION IN A TEACHER CORPS PROJECT

Recruitment and Community Technical Resource Center

CA 013 674

July 1980

2

COMMUNITY
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Paper Number
TWO

TWO VIEWS OF TECHNIQUES FOR DEVELOPING COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION IN A TEACHER CORPS PROJECT

(PROJECT PERSONNEL PRESPECTIVES)

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With an Introduction by

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July, 1980

"This Project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare under contract number 300790312. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, nor does mention of trade names, commerical products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government."

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INTRODUCTION

This paper includes two papers by experienced Teacher Corps project personnel. Both papers describe techniques and approaches project personnel have used to explore and develop community-based education from their prespectives. Also, both papers have two aspects in common:

(1) a focus on carefully identifying what the community sees its needs to be -- needs assessment

(2) a concern for learning by all in and for the community -- experiential learning.

Much development work remains if community-based education is to become a pervasive process in Teacher Corps projects. The first, tentative, steps outlined in these two papers are shared with you to exemplify the context of two existing programs where the commitment to community-based education may be similar to yours. Something can be done. It is not the ideal that is found in practice, but rather that which is possible in a given place at a given time with a given set of resources. The examples set forth in these papers state such a reality from the prespective of experienced project personnel.

This paper is the second in a series of papers on community-based education that have been prepared by Recruitment and Technical Resource Centers. These papers represent part of the Centers' contractual responsibilities to Teacher Corps to provide materials and assistance to Teacher Corps projects in the area of community-based education.

Community-Based Education:

The Norfolk Position

Elaine P. Witty and Yvonne B. Miller

Community-Based Education:

The Norfolk Position

Elaine P. Witty and Yvonne B. Miller

The concept of community-based education excites many people. At the same time it frightens many others. The idea that there is within view a way of involving universities, schools, and community persons in collaborative efforts to solve school and societal problems is an idea that tends to threaten those persons who feel that power should reside in their hands. Hence they are frightened of the possibility of sharing "power." Nevertheless, the challenge of joining forces with other agencies to realize the best potential for all concerned is a challenge that promises new prospects for universities with declining enrollments, school systems with overburdening failure rates, and communities with monumental problems concerning human and environmental development. The promise that community-based education will enhance the resolution of the future problems of schools, universities, and communities is one which must be fulfilled.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss:

(1) Identifying community-perceived needs for education;

(2) Integrating community experience with school learning.

WAYS TO IDENTIFY COMMUNITY PERCEIVED NEEDS FOR EDUCATION

Community persons are a valuable source of ideas for improving the quality of education provided by the public schools and universities and improving the quality of life in society. The ideas of these people usually remain untapped because educators generally are not trained to work with parents and other community persons. Parents generally are not attuned to viewing their

own contributions as critical to the educational improvement process; to working with teachers; or to using other mechanisms to effectively intervene in the system. Conversely, many educators have not yet developed the competence or perception required to see that most parents, not just middle-class parents, are in a position to articulate suggestions for improving education for their children. The fact that parents of children from low-income families have definite ideas about schooling that they are willing to share with persons who are willing to listen and ask questions has been demonstrated repeatedly in Head Start, Title I, as well as in Teacher Corps projects.

Community-based programs are successful to the extent to which they identify and work to meet community perceived needs. Care should be taken to distinguish between those needs identified for the community from those actively perceived by the community.

The needs as perceived by the community may be ascertained in a number of ways. The following suggestions may be used to improve the validity of results of a process used to ascertain community perceived needs:

(1) Inquire of a representative sample of community persons;

(2) Use multi-media approaches to contact as many persons as possible -- radio, slide-tape presentations, posters, flyers, videotape recordings, personal contacts, newspapers, and community newsletters;

(3) Involve community persons in actual data collection processes;

(4) Use survey language that clearly communicates to those being surveyed the nature of the processes used, the reasons for the survey, and the purposes for which the information will be used;

(5) Use strategies that help community persons realize that educators will deal sincerely with the needs after those needs are identified;

(6) Lay the groundwork to reduce the credibility gap between the community, university, and the school system so that the community has confidence that the identification of needs will result in changes;

(7) Involve the community in identifying needs in areas where it is possible to deliver services, rather than for the total school system. Conducting several needs assessments at various intervals may produce more reliable and useful information than one global needs assessment conducted at one time during the school year.

Experiences with community-based programs in the Norfolk Teacher Corps Project has led to the following suggestions for ways of identifying community perceived needs.

Small Group Discussions

In low income communities, small group discussions are of tremendous value in identifying needs that the community itself actually perceives. First of all, rapport with the individuals who must share their ideas can be established more quickly in small groups than in large groups or in personal interviews. For most individuals, the risk of sharing ideas is lessened by the presence of a few peers.

The small group has other attractive features. The chances of identifying a number of needs are enhanced in that a discussion of one idea stimulates the emergence of other ideas. Also, participants may speak of other community persons who have similar concerns because they feel free to identify other persons without feeling that they are betraying confidences. Thus, a sense of the scope of a specific need can be ascertained.

In order to maximize the benefits of the small group meeting, the following suggestions should be considered:

(1) The group should be formed by inviting several persons who have vested interest in the subject matter or the community area being discussed;

(2) The group size should not exceed twelve persons;

(3) The group leader should be someone who knows many members of the group;

(4) The group leader should devise a procedure for helping group members get to know each other -- who they are and why they are in the group;

(5) The task for the group should be made clear during the initial minutes of the meeting;

(6) The group leader should serve as the group recorder until it is clear that another member of the group feels comfortable as a group recorder.

Interviews

Indepth descriptions of needs may be generated easily in personal one-to-one interview situations. Predetermined questions may be followed up with additional probing questions as the situation demands.

Suggestions for conducting a successful interview include:

(1) Efforts should be made to conduct the interview in a comfortable setting;

(2) Interviewers should demonstrate respect for the potential contributions of community representatives. The climate should be such that the community person recognizes the interviewer's sincere desire to listen attentively and to record accurately and fairly the results of the dialogue;

(3) An understanding of the purpose of the interview should be established early in the interview;

(4) The interviewer should avoid placing a value on responses made by community representative;

(5) The interviewer should maintain a positive attitude throughout the data gathering session;

(6) The interviewer should check to make sure that he or she understands the intentions and meanings of the interviewee;

(7) The interviewee should be assured that confidentiality will be maintained.

Questionnaires, Surveys, Checklists

The major advantage of questionnaires in identifying needs perceived by the community is that a large number of opinions may be gathered and sampled quickly. Also, many parents and other community members may feel more free to express their true opinions anonymously.

The disadvantages of questionnaires, however, should also be considered. Many persons fail to return questionnaires, some may misunderstand the questions, and others may provide vindictive rather than constructive responses to questions. Questionnaires designed to gather precisely the desired data are difficult to construct. Some guides to follow in constructing and using questionnaires are:

(1) The format of the questionnaire should be simple and attractive to the audience.

(2) Where possible, advance notice should be given that questionnaires will be mailed or distributed.

(3) Some incentitive to help secure a good number of responses should be built into the questionnaire.

(4) The language of the questionnaire should be simple and precise.

(5) The responses to the questionnaire should be clear and easily checked off.

Telephone Surveys

In the absence of sufficient time for personal contact, telephone surveys may be used effectively. Timing of such calls is critical in as much as telephone calls from strangers may be considered an intrusion by some persons.

Some suggestions for conducting effective telephone surveys are:

(1) Use community persons as the callers, (telephone survey committee);

(2) Orientation sessions or briefing sessions should be conducted with the community callers to assure that they understand the content of the call and are comfortable with the questions they are to ask and the response they can expect;

(3) Rely on the community caller to establish the most appropriate time for calling;

(4) Devise a standard way to record responses.

Door to Door Convassing and Home Visitation

Door to door canvassing is perhaps the most difficult way to gather data on community-perceived needs. It offers the advantage, however, of helping trainees and educators become aware of the home and community environment of some of the children served by the schools. It also provides the opportunity to talk directly with many persons who will not attend group meetings or respond to telephone or mail surveys.

Some suggestions for enhancing the effectiveness of door to door canvassing and home visitation are:

(1) Spread word in the community that a door-to-door canvass will be conducted;

(2) Have the canvassing done by teams of two persons, one of them a member of the community;

(3) Provide training to canvassers in techniques for establishing rapport;

(4) Canvassers should identify immediately the purpose of their visit, badges are helpful;

(5) Information on the school, community, and university should be discussed first and materials left in each home.

Solicitations at Civic League Meetings, Community Councils, and Church Meetings

Meetings of established groups in the community provide convenient audiences of community persons who may be willing to help identify educational needs perceived by the community. Care should be taken to ask permission to make announcements, request time on the agenda, or solicit signatures and lists of persons willing to participate in interviews and group meetings. Since these groups represent special interests, care should be taken to collect information from other sources as well. The following suggestions may be helpful for such meetings:

(1) Arrange to talk with the officers of the group in advance of the meeting to inform them about the purpose of your solicitation and to obtain suggestions of ways to approach the larger group;

(2) Dress appropriately for the meeting;

(3) Listen carefully to the persons at the meeting. Avoid talking down on people. Also avoid talking too much;

(4) Be sure to establish credibility by clearly stating the purpose of the survey as well as the title, address, and telephone number of the presenter;

(5) Communicate willingness to hear from people by providing a schedule of time and places for further contacts.

Identification of community-perceived needs is the first step in community-based education programming. The second step is placing those needs in the order of priority. The third step is to design jointly a program to address the identified needs. Such a design includes ways to link school, university,and community resources to create learning situations for pupils, teachers, university personnel, parents, and other community persons.

WAYS TO INTEGRATE COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES AND SCHOOL LEARNING

A controlling factor in the successful integration of community experiences and school learning is the attitude of the teacher. Given the appropriate attitude, the teacher can develop a curriculum that includes a list of the skills to be learned that addresses the perceived needs; identifies abundant community resources; secures support of the administrators; and works with appropriate community groups to provide programs which the community understands will provide the skills that address perceived educational needs. Appropriate attitude of the teacher implies a belief in the value of human beings; a hope that the potential development and contributions of all people will overcome pervasive needs; and a desire for developing the best possible delivery of services to the children and adults of the community.

Community and school learning may be integrated through programs provided at three levels: Activities; Content; and Goals.

Level I. Activities

The easiest level to provide is activities selection. The teacher merely includes resources from the community in classroom assignments and activities. The teacher may invite a community parent in to serve as a consultant or resource person on a particular topic that the children are studying. Or, the teacher may take the children on an excursion to a place where aspects of the topics under discussion are actual and real. An example is a field trip to the seaside to study erosion.

Level II. Content

In this level, the teacher identifies problems and issues in the community as topics of study and designs assignments and activities which help children develop problem-solving abilities in the areas identified for study. Examples of this level of learning integration include the development of problem solving units on: urban housing; a particular historical site or event; the future environmental effect of a nuclear power plant in a marsh area of the community; or the role and function of the churches of the community. Other possible topics include a study of the recreational facilities of a community; the designing and making of a park; a survey of types of grocery stores serving a particular community and the cost of goods at these stores; or a study of small businesses in the community. A content level program tries to bring new meaning and understanding of the human, social, intellectual, and economic factors effecting the community.

Level III. Goals

This level requires a greater integration of community learning in

the curriculum. The teacher identifies the talents and skills individual children and adults in the community need to develop to become leaders in the community. Community resources that support learning the skills and taking on leadership are identified. Then, the process of problem-solving itself for the community becomes the goal of the curriculum. Three kinds of goals may be included in the curriculum: (1) helping children value the community and its resources; (2) helping community persons develop leadership skills, and (3) helping teachers and administrators enhance their skills as members of a community. Translating these goals into active programs requires organizing community councils to provide direction for programs. Things to be considered include: establishing a pool of volunteer parent aides to work in the classroom or other places the program is offered; offering seminars on leadership skills and organizational system analysis for teachers, parents, other community members, including children; and faciiitating the enrollment of community persons in adult education courses.

For the children, the goals may be developed through programs in which community persons serve as models, and through programs which address the reality of factors that lead to failure in realizing the potential community growth and development. Some examples of the kinds of goal statements that have led to a curriculum that provided a higher degree of integration of community and school learning in the Norfolk Teacher Corps Project include:

- The children will be able to describe and understand the hierarchy identified with power and organization in the community;
- The children will develop a sense of civic responsibility and respect for authority.

- The children will develop self-renewal skills by using community models to increase their motivation and goals;
- The children will develop multicultural concepts that facilitate understanding and valuing differences in language, learning ability, values, traditions, life styles, cultural and religious perferences, and will react to these differences in positive ways;
- The children will develop an awareness of many careers;
- The children will enhance their levels of life ambitions through interaction with role models and on-site observations of professionals at work;
- The children will identify positive physical and social resources in the urban environment;
- The children will identify individual community persons as sources of strength and wisdom.

Integrating community experiences with school learning at the university level is also important.

The university's role in community-based education is dependent, at any point in time, on the relationship between the needs of the community and the resources of the university. Sometimes the best role a university can play in community-based education is that of a coordinating agency, without assuming the dominant leadership position in the group. Often university personnel feel that they must assume the leadership role in any group of which they are a part.

Many times the community person is the leader in solving a certain real social or political problem. In such instances the university role is certainly subordinate.

Community-based education from the university's perspective requires activity that enhances the research, teaching, and service function of the university. Areas of involvement include:

- Providing knowledge based on community needs and resources (research, teaching);
- Conducting research on community problems (research, service);
- Developing an awareness in the student population of the strengths, values, needs and problems of the community, and a commitment to participate with the community in solving problems (teaching, service);
- Identifying sites in the community that can serve as learning laboratories for emerging professionals (research);
- Releasing facilities for use by community groups (service);
- Using community persons as consultants and resources for instructional, cultural and social activities (teaching, service);
- Sharing enrichment and cultural events with the community — concert series, art exhibits (service, teaching);
- Offering specialized services to community groups — use of planetarium; use of library; special programs for children such as swimming classes, remedial reading, and clinical testing (service, teaching);
- Providing continuing education courses and programs for personal, professional or vocational development of community persons (teaching).

This paper has discussed community-based education in terms of the following topics:

(1) Ways to identify community-perceived needs for education;

(2) Ways to integrate community experience with school learning.

There are, however, many other important aspects of community-based education that were not mentioned in this paper. Uppermost on such a list of topics is the role of the community in supporting the university in its efforts to attain health and vitality in a tightening economy. This concern is critical for traditionally black institutions, which are being threatened by competition for students and faculty, reduced budget allocations, and the competency-testing movement in public schools, a trend which may depress the number of blacks graduating from high school.

The role of the community in supporting traditionally black institutions is an important issue that will shape the focus of community-based education in some communities. Many such institutions have a history of serving as the pivot for community education endeavors. Their future is tied to the willingness of the community to continue to speak out about the needs that such institutions must continue to address in providing the education of the community leaders for today and tomorrow.

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Community-Based Education -- Needs Assessment Approaches

and

Experiential Learning

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Community-Based Education -- Needs Assessment Approaches And Experiential Learning

Alan Brown

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the country there is a vast amount of parent and community involvement in the schools. Despite the impressive statistics of community involvement that could be cited, transfers of power to parents and citizens seem minimal. Professional domination continues.

There are signs that educators are beginning to accept the general principle of citizen participation, but they clearly want manageable, controllable, polite involvement. They increasingly accept "input" by citizens, as long as the present power relationships remain in place.

The goal of Community-Based Education as emphasized in this paper is to increase participation of citizens in such a way as to allow them to exercise power and to have an effect on decision making. While Community-Based Education has other obvious important goals, this one remains among the most important.

Many reasons have been advanced for citizen participation; six are discussed in this paper. They are not intended to be mutually exclusive.

The practical goal of most community participants in a project is to change some aspects of policy, not grappling with deep issues. Participants from diverse backgrounds challenge the elitist premises on which much educational policy is based. Poor and working-class people, black and white, continue to endure poor schools. They share a common burden. Yet poor and working class

people, white and minority, often suspect one group or another of receiving favored treatment by policy makers at the expense of other disadvantaged groups. Common to all these low-income groups in most cities is a determination that schools should effectively teach the basic skills that students will need to compete successfully in the job market.

Citizens participate to affect:

(1) Policy -- Citizen participation leads to institutional policies which are more responsive to the needs of the constituents and communities served. Citizen participation will contribute to developing school policies and practices that are more effective and equitable than is generally the case now.

(2) Service Delivery -- Citizen participation can improve the nature and quality of educational services. The capacity of the institution to understand and solve educational problems is enhanced if parents and other citizens are part of the problem-solving effort.

(3) Community Development -- Effective citizen participation contributes to the development of a healthy community that is stable, where goods and services are adequately and fairly distributed, and that has a sense of community efficiency, confidence, and power.

(4) Individual Development -- Participation contributes to the development of a sense of efficiency and confidence on the part of the constituents of citizens' organizations. Participation also may provide other benefits to individuals: training, education, job advancement, money, personal status, and social pleasure.

(5) Performance of Students in School -- Citizen participation contributes to improved performance by students, with higher levels of academic achievement; lower rates of truancy, dropouts, vandalism, discipline problems, and violence; better student attitudes and behavior; and better post secondary school opportunities in employment and education.

(6) Organizational Effectiveness -- Participation contributes to making citizen organizations more effective.

The point of view advocated here is participatory democracy. It is characterized by the aim of creating new opportunities for citizen participation and influence in all institutions. The commitment is to the possibility of developing a more healthy, stable, and equitable democracy than is now found in American society. This means that decision making power be decentralized and that literacy and competence be developed throughout the society. In a democracy, the right to participate and influence is simply a given, belonging to the people by definition. This is also the goal of community-based education.

This participatory strategy can be subdivided into two categories. The first is apolitical. It values participation for one's own development. Participation, it is argued, results in improved organizational efficiency and better service delivery. As a sense of control over one's life and heightened feelings of self-worth emerge, participants learn practical problem solving skills. Techniques for this type of participation include participatory planning, group efforts in setting goals, and exercises in futurism. Other techniques include participation in forums, discussions, instant feedback polling, and training sessions for improved interpersonal and intergroup relations.

The second category of participatory democracy is explicitly political. It emphasizes opening opportunities for citizens to participate in decision making, policy determination, resources allocation, and institutional governance. Its goal is two-fold: to redistribute power and to enhance civic competence. Some techniques include community organizing; information gathering for political and organizational ends; the dispersing of centralized power; advocacy

of individual and class rights; and the use of collaborative decision making.

The two currents of participatory democratic strategies for reform of institutions often flow along separate courses. They sometimes converge, however, blending political and problem-solving thinking. They are not completely compatible. In both cases knowledgeable participation requires an identification of the actual needs of a community as the community perceives and states them. This needs statement is the basis for action programs and for the evaluation of the effect of an effort.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT APPROACHES

Needs assessment approaches vary in comprehensiveness, complexity, cost, the length of time required to conduct them, the information collected, and in their relative effectiveness. They can be categorized into five specific types:

(1) The key informant approach;

(2) The community forum approach;

(3) The rates-under-treatment approach;

(4) The social indicators approach;

(5) The field survey approach.

These approaches can be used as parts of an integrated, sequential program or they can be conducted independently of one another. It is important to note, however, that the relative effectiveness of any one of these approaches is best measured in terms of how successful it is in securing the information necessary to organize a program that achieves the goals outlined as part of the description, conceptualization, and operationalization stages of the design for action process. Each of these approaches has merit.

Key Informant

One technique that can be used by those wishing to assess a community's needs is the key informant approach. This method is a research activity that, as the title suggests, is based on information secured from those who are in a good position to know what the community's needs and utilization patterns are. Therefore, the criteria for selecting a key informant are the individual's knowledge of the community, its people, their needs, and the patterns of services being received.

Once the proposed program objectives are outlined and key informants are identified, the next step is to construct a questionnaire or interview schedule that will permit obtaining comparable information from all informants. Methods for securing information include the personal interview, mailed questionnaires, or telephone interview. The most effective technique is the personal interview, since it permits face to face contact, a free exchange of ideas, and a high response rate. Mailed questionnaires produce response rates that tend to be lower than the response rates of personal interviews. In addition, the kinds and amount of data obtained are limited by the constraints imposed on the questionnaire in terms of the questions that can be asked and their format. Telephone interviews can be used quite successfully in surveys of key informants where the randomness and representativeness of those being interviewed is not an issue. The principal shortcoming of this technique is the restriction on the time allowed for the questioning process. If the inteview schedule is brief and highly structured, however, and if there is reason to believe that those selected as key informants will cooperate, the telephone interview may prove adequate.

These techniques are not mutually exclusive and a combination of the methods might be used effectively. As an extension of combining these approaches, all of the informants could be brought together in a meeting or series of meetings to discuss the findings of the assessment. Providing for increased participation by the informants would more likely lead to a more complex integration of the problems identified.

There are some very obvious advantages to the key informant approach. First, it is relatively simple and inexpensive to conduct. Second, it permits the input and interaction of many different individuals, each with individual perspectives of community needs. The interaction inherent in this process encourages a broad-based discussion of those needs and services perceived as being of greatest importance to the community. In addition, some other important functions are served. Through the processes of discussion and interaction, lines of communication in the community can be established or strengthened. As a consequence, a more concerted community based approach to establishing priorities and allocating resources may take place. Also, the enthusiasm such programs often generate is helpful to all involved.

The basic disadvantage of the key informant approach is that it has a built in bias. It is based on the views of those who would tend to see the community's needs from their own individual or organizational perspectives. It is quite possible that these perspectives, even collectively, may not represent an accurate appraisal of the totality or types of needs which exist in the community. Because the key informants are not "representative" of the community in a statistical probability sense, it is also possible that they may not be aware of those people who are not visible to them, e.g., the very young or the very old, the socially or geographically isolated,

and/or the powerless poor may go unnoticed and, consequently, unplanned for and their needs unmet. Nevertheless, the key informant approach can be very helpful in getting selected individuals to think together about the common needs of those living in the community.

Community Forum

The community forum approach relies on the perceptions of individuals who are asked to attend a meeting to assess the needs of the community. It is similar to the key informant approach in that it is based on the views of individuals; some of the more serious disadvantages of the key informant approach are reduced, by widening the circle of respondents to include persons from the general population. Forum studies are designed around a series of public meetings to which all residents are invited and asked to express their beliefs about the needs of the community. The approach is a flexible one. It can be designed to elicit information from any member of the community willing to attend a public meeting; it can also include input from specific age, racial, ethnic or other groups that might be identified as having special needs.

The process involved in conducting a community forum is similar to that of the key informant approach. There is a need to outline the specific objectives of the proposed program. This can be accomplished by preparing a list of questions that are designed to structure the sessions around the issues to be discussed. Although it is important to have these basic questions presented, latitude ought to be provided to encourage spontaneity and candor on the part of the participants.

Once the format of the meetings is designed, a concerted effort to publicize the meetings and to encourage attendance from all segments of the community must be made. This can be done in a variety of ways. Letters can be mailed to individuals, families, and selected organizations urging attendance. The mass media, including newspapers, radio and television, are logical sources for advertising.

If at all feasible, a number of strategically located meetings ought to be planned so that small groups can be formed to encourage as much individual participation as possible. Large assemblies held in school auditoriums, churches, and other public centers are not conducive to the kind of open interchange of ideas that is most desired and, therefore, should be avoided when possible. The forum could begin with a large meeting of the participants at which time the objectives of the program should be outlined, ground rules established, room assignments made and other logistical tasks completed, e.g., the selection of secretary-recorder and the introduction of group leaders.

As the smaller group meetings progress, it will be necessary to record the ideas, attitudes, and perceptions of those present. These notes should be as comprehensive as possible and special efforts should be made to list all of the suggestions made by those attending. As the final step in these meetings, a summary of suggestions regarding needs and services should be prepared; special note should be given items that are accorded a high priority or that share a strong concensus among participants.

There are a number of advantages to community forums. They are relatively easy to arrange and inexpensive to conduct. They also provide

an excellent opportunity for input from many segments of the community through a process that is very likely to bring to light new areas of previously undefined needs. The forum also aids in identifying those citizens most interested in helping to meet the needs of individuals in their community. These persons can be valuable resources for implementation of programs later.

As with all needs assessment programs, there are some disadvantages to the forum. The first is that of logistics. Especially in large communities, the task of finding a sufficient number of strategically located meeting sites may pose some problems. Even more difficult may be obtaining a representative attendance at the meetings. Only a partial view of the community's perceptions of needs and services will be produced unless the meetings are well attended by a broad cross section of knowledgeable citizens who are articulate in expressing their beliefs and in sharing their information.

At another level, those planning a forum in order to ascertain an area's needs must be aware of the potential for negative outcomes. There is a real possibility that the forum may be transformed from a positive information—seeking meeting to a generalized grievance session. This can occur if some group in the community takes over the meetings in a physical or organizational sense and uses them as vehicles to express their disenchantment with a wide range of real or perceived injustices that are beyond the immediate scope or control of the project. And, while it is to be recognized that all persons in a community ought to have an opportunity to express their feelings regarding social, political, economic and other perceived injustices, or to freely voice their concerns about the inadequacy of the human services education system, it must also be recognized that local Teacher Corps projects have a limited respon-

sibility to alter the institutional arrangements of a community or society. Therefore, it is important for those conducting the forum to be aware of the possibility that the program's purposes may be lost if the meetings become focused on problems for which Teacher Corps has no scope of responsibility.

Another disadvantage of the forum lies in the possibility that the meetings may heighten expectations that cannot be met. Accordingly, those in charge of the forum must make it clear from the time of the early publicity onward that the sessions are designed primarily to obtain information that can be used for assessment and planning. Early in the session, those attending should be made aware of the realistic outcomes that may be expected as a result of the forum.

A final and very significant disadvantage to the forum is related to the kind of data obtained. The information secured is largely impressionistic. And, while this is extremely interesting, particularly for those planning to conduct more comprehensive programs, the data is not easily amenable to systematic analysis; neither is there any guarantee that the input received is accurate or representative of all groups in the community. What is needed is not an approach entirely different from the key informant and community forum approaches but one that builds on both by securing more objective or "hard" data that can be used to collaborate, qualify and/or expand the findings derived from them. Three additional approaches generally available that have been used by those doing needs assessment studies are: (1) rates- under-treatment; (2) social indicators; (3) field survey approaches.

The rates-under-treatment (RUT) approach to needs assessment can be defined as that approach which is based on a descriptive enumeration of persons who have utilized the services of the health, education and welfare agencies and systems of a community. The underlying assumption is that one can estimate the needs of the community from a sample of persons who have received services. Historically, this approach has been widely used in research dealing with the prevalence of treatment patterns in general populations. But it is very amenable for use in education areas.

As with all needs assessment approaches, the first task to be completed is to define the objectives the program will address.

The sources of data available to those doing RUT surveys can be located in a number of places. Most logically one would begin with an analysis of information from the parents of school children. Most or all of these data will probably have been gathered as part of the baseline study.

The advantages of the RUT approach to needs assessment accrue largely from the availability of the data and the relatively low cost incurred in securing and analyzing it. A secondary benefit of the RUT approach is that it tends to increase communications between the human service and educational agencies and consumers in a community. This often raises the general level of sensitivity to the needs of those in a community and, at the same time, a greater integration of services is made possible since problems and modes of service are directly tied in the study. Taken as a whole, a RUT study can provide an excellent overview of the services being provided those in a community.

The RUT approach has a major disadvantage: The problem is associated with adapting its use to education where service provided is not clearly tied to a specific problem.

Rates-under-treatment studies have been used for a long time in the United States as methods of estimating needs and determining the patterns of care for given populations. These studies are most useful when they are integrated into more comprehensive needs assessment programs which include social indicators and field survey data.

The Social Indicators Approach

The social indicators approach to needs assessment is based primarily in inferences of needs drawn generally from descriptive statistics found in public records and reports. The underlying assumption of this approach is that it is possible to make useful estimates of the needs and social well-being of those in a community by analyzing statistics on selected factors that have been found to be highly correlated with persons having needs. As such, these statistics are regarded, on the basis of face validity, to be indicators of need. Some of the factors that are commonly used as indicators include the spatial arrangements of the community's people and institutions; the sociodemographic characteristics of the population such as age, race, sex, income; the social behavior and well-being of people, particularly as they relate to crime, substance abuse, family patterns, and morbidity and mortality rates; and, the general social conditions within which people live, e.g., low literacy rates, substandard housing, overcrowding, accessibilty to services, and economic conditions. These factors and many others can be considered as social indicators and, when they are analyzed as constellations, they can provide

important information about a community and the needs of those in it.

The social indicator approach to needs assessment is a flexible one. It ranges from very simplistic designs using one or two indicators, such as census data on housing or the number of persons per dwelling unit, to very complex designs that consist of forty to sixty variables that require the employment of statistical procedures.

Regardless of the complexity of the design, certain basic assumptions are fundamental to conducting social indicators assessments. The notion of the city as a constellation of "natural areas" has proven useful as a method for describing the social subdivisions within communities. Most simply stated, a "natural area" can be defined as a unit within a community, identifiable on the basis of common characteristics that set it apart from other units. Some of the variables most commonly used to identify "natural areas" include:

- Topographical features such as rivers and terrain and land use patterns;
- Sociodemographic attributes, including age, race, sex, ethnicity, income, education, occupation and family patterns;
- Population factors, including distribution, density, mobility and migration;
- The spatial arrangements of institutions; and
- Health and social well-being characteristics such as literacy, mortality and morbidity rates for a wide range of illnesses, crimes and arrest records, suicides, and the prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse.

These data and many more can be obtained from the U. S. Government Printing Office; the U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census; county health departments; community mental health centers; private medical

practitioners; comprehensive health planning Agencies; and local community colleges and universities.

More of the disadvantages of the use of social indicators as needs assessment programs are theoretical in nature. One of the most serious of these is due to the fact that many of the data utilized as "indicators" are only indirect measures of the needs they are supposed to represent. Consequently, there is reason to question the validity of some social indicators. For example, divorce, separation and illegitimacy rates may be a valid index of family stability and security for many groups in our society. For other groups, however, they may be totally invalid. Such an index may really be measuring the incongruity between differing social class values instead of indicating the ability of a group of persons related to one another by law or blood to perform the necessary functions that make family life stable and secure. Similar criticisms can be made of many other social indicators. Therefore, those constructing the list of factors to be used as indicators must be sensitive to their own personal or class biases, if the measures constructed are to be valid, reliable, and useful.

Survey

The survey approach to needs assessment is based on the collection of data from a sample or entire population of persons living in a community. The most common methods used are interview schedules or questionnaires, composed of questions designed to elicit information from respondents regarding their health, social well-being and education, and the patterns of care or services being received.

The gathering of information by means of surveys has had a very long history. When done correctly, it is the most scientifically valid and, hence, the best approach for assessing needs and for evaluating and restructuring service and education programs.

Many have argued that surveys are of limited value because of the problems associated with the validity and reliability of the responses one receives to questions relating to an individual's educational needs. The criticisms are very important and cannot be ignored; these criticisms however, are not unique to survey approaches. The problems of memory span, accurate recall, and verbal skills are equally present in interview approaches, for example. They need to be considered by those who are going to make judgments on the basis of the information collected in any fashion. At another level, surveys are characterized as being too complex to conceive, too costly to conduct, and beyond the technical competence of most agencies. And, as such, it is argued, surveys should not be considered as viable options when an agency is contemplating the initiation of a needs assessment program.

Needs assessment approaches based on surveys are begun just as the other approaches are, by defining the project's objectives and by conceptualizing and operationalizing the methods by which valid information can be most practically and economically obtained.

The three most common techniques used in surveys are: (1) the telephone interview; (2) the mailed questionnaire; and (3) the person to person interview. Although the methodology of each of these is somewhat different, their basic format is the same. Each employes a series of questions that is asked of a respondent.

The items selected for inclusion in the survey instrument ought to have a direct relationship to the specific goals of the program. The tendency is to include a great many items because they are interesting; this ought to be avoided for a number of reasons. A large number of items that have no immediate relationship to the project's goals tend to fragment the questionnaire/schedule so that it loses its structural integrity; the cost of gathering and analyzing the data is increased; and, by overburdening the respondent, the response rate is reduced, a condition that tends to reduce the validity of the findings.

Once the questions have been selected, decisions regarding their format must be made. This is important because the format of the questions influences the response rate, the cost of gathering, coding and processing the data, and importantly, the types of statistical methods one can use in analyzing the results. For example, open-ended questions, when asked in a mailed questionnaire, take more time to answer than fixed alternative types, a fact that tends to increase the nonresponse rate. These questions also complicate coding procedures and limit modes of analysis. A limited number of open-ended questions may be asked in a questionnaire but these ought to be clearly stated, easily answered and near the end of the survey instrument.

The issue of which type of question to ask is related to the debate over the use of structured versus unstructured schedules or questionnaires. One may prefer the structured format for several reasons. First, this type of questioning reduces interviewer contamination. It also produces a greater homogeneity of the responses obtained: this provides data that are more effectively coded and analyzed. In addition, structured items take less time to answer, a fact that permits the asking of more questions

in a given time period. And, importantly, fixed alternatives greatly expand the types of statistical anayliss that can be used. Data gathered by unstructured schedules or questionnaires with a great many open-ended items rarely allow for statistical analysis.

It can greatly expand the utility of the other needs assessment approaches. In a real sense, it is the approach that has the greatest capacity to integrate the findings of all the approaches into a meaningful and useful system of research and planning.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

In any community-based education program, different kinds of activities allow for more or less community participation. The following list encourages participants to expand their knowledge and skill while working on community needs. Some or all of these activities might be included in a community-based education program.

- Action Research -- Investigating specific issues or problems has long been a means to further involve people. Gathering facts, interviewing people, reviewing policy guidelines and looking behind the scenes have all been specific tactics utilized by action research groups.
- Block Clubs -- The block club is an informal and small-scale participation vehicle. Groups normally hold informal meetings at members' homes. Block clubs enable people to raise specific issues immediate to the neighborhood and also provide a means of informal socializing. Clubs can also be linked in a network to form neighborhood associations for action.

° Community Congress -- The congress is a specific community-wide participation technique developed by certain companies and groups on the West Coast. It entails community-wide exploration of local problems through a format of large meetings and includes an audio-video perspective on the community developed by a person from outside the community.

° Community Cooperatives -- Employment, day care, food-buying, transportation. neighborhood gardening tools, and senior citizen medical services are all examples of people joining together on a cooperative basis to meet some need or concern. Cooperatives have a strong tradition in American society and many may operate in a rather informal fashion while others are large and complex.

° Community Games and Simulations -- These participation vehicles are normally short term in nature and are somewhat structured. They add a different dimension to involvement that oftentimes enables participants to try out new behavior or look at a problem from a different perspective. These techniques have been widely used in new town development, land use and urban development, community education and adult education program development.

° Community Leadership Development Workshops -- They may be sponsored by one organization or a cooperative undertaking of several agencies or neighborhood groups. Focus is primarily upon skill development and human relations training along with a means for focusing upon specific leadership techniques and approaches.

° Goal Development Techniques -- Annual community-wide goal-setting sessions have been widely conducted around the country. The sponsor may be city government, the public schools, a civic-minded organization or any number of other possibilities. The specific techniques may

vary in length and format but most are designed to arrive at a consensus of widely held goals as a means in further planning for agencies and organizations.

° Problem Solving Conferences -- Special workshops or conferences convened to deal with particular community or neighborhood problems. The focus of such conferences centers around understanding the problem better, exploring the variety of possibilities for action, and finally arriving at a series of workable plans to address the problem. Longer term citizen participation vehicles may be created or may emerge from this specialized approach.

° Spectaculars -- These are high visibility community-wide events designed to strengthen community unity, build pride, and have fun in the process. They are normally one-time events but may become annual community affairs. Community festivals, special athletic events, celebration days, cross-town and/or intercommunity events are just a few examples.

° Statewide Citizens Participation Committees -- States, such as Alaska, have pioneered ways to bring people from home communities closer to statewide government and the legislative process. Conferences composed primarily of low-income residents are designed to put people in contact with key state decision makers. Participants identify key issues of focus, adopt resolutions and lobby for the development or passage of specific bills related to those issues.

° Task Force/Ad Hoc Committees -- These participation processes are normally short term in nature and are designed with a specific action focus. Like all other committees, the actual size, composition and sponsoring source vary. They represent one of the most common ways for addressing specific issues.

- Town Hall Meetings -- This process has long been associated with the founding of this country and still survives in many parts of the country. They enable citizens to hold a rather large gathering for the purposes of discovering common problems and issues. They further provide a sense of community and opportunity to hear a variety of viewpoints on the local issues at hand.

CONCLUSION

Community-based education fosters increased improvement of the individuals in a community. Needs assessment techniques allow community members to state their concerns and to utilize these statements as the quasi-objective data for action in and through various experiential learning activities. Yet, all of this is for naught if the community does not increase its control over its own destiny and the agencies, including educators, that decide what services to provide to meet the organizations' needs or the communities' needs.

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Special appreciation is extended to the following people for the input and assistant they provided in the preparation of this paper.

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